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Indexing

Abstracting

MORALITY AND ETHICS IN POLITICS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

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Abstract

Morality and ethics are among the most influential factors affecting society's development throughout history. There is a slight difference between the terms ethics and morality. Ethics derives from mankind's experience throughout history and in actuality it represents the essence of the ethical rules and principles derived from the human understanding of the differentiation between good and evil. Whereas morality defers from this definition of ethics in the sense that morality has its origin in religion and theology. Morality in politics or the Moral politics has gradually succeeded in conquering the public scene. The contemporary world that we live in today is facing many challenges that have a moral auspice; humankind needs more answers. An adequate academic approach is needed and further public discussion entails. Societal involvement is crucial in any attempts of finding the most appropriate response to the challenges of the modern world encumbered by ethical and moral issues.

Key words: moral; ethics; religion; society; politics

INTRODUCTION

The existence of God, according to Kant, is what defines the postulate of the moral law. Hence, he believes that religion, specifically the belief in the existence of God, is not only necessary for having a theoretical basis for morality, but for having a practical foundation for morality, as well. Kant further states that if God is an illusion, then values and virtues i.e. social virtues are also an illusion. In order for anyone to believe in the dignity and excellence of one's own soul and the souls of others, he would need to believe in the supreme principle of respect and excellence, which in fact originate from God and the image of God in which we are created (Janet 1884, 118). Values and virtues are desirable fundamentals for everyone, and the life of an individual should be based upon these premises since they are important for building and regulating the relations in communities and societies.

Kant believes that the ultimate principle of morality must be the moral law, established abstractly enough to be able to lead us in the right direction and being applicable in any situation. There is not a single society which succeeded outside of this rule, i.e. without postulating the value-based *modus operandi* at the very core of its societal system, giving the system a deep moral character in itself. Zooming out from the grand-scale to the micro-scale, in the lives of individuals, no success, prosperity, hope, and happy future are possible on a sustainable level, without moral grounds in the hearts of these individuals. The moral grounds should derive from a source for moral obligation. “Any exploration of morality must include a search for the source of moral obligation” (Burns 2008).

The Biblical model for the creation of man in the image and character of God, gives us knowledge that each individual carries a kind of a moral mark since his birth, and this is an embedded moral code that is the core of the biblical message for our existence as mankind. If people are created in the image of God, then they have a solid moral foundation with which they are innately equipped to live morally. According to this Christian view if individuals in their lives choose to develop and govern their character and nature in accordance with these innate moral postulates and aligned with the instructions of the Lord, then they will be bringing on the scene in their lives a natural environment and a state of consciousness in which they can naturally develop themselves, achieve the most in their lives, and realize the dreams of their existence, satisfied with their life achievements.

The question that should be posed in this context is, what the values and virtues are that are the matter of this discussion, where have they originated, and what might be the way of ascertaining that precisely those values and virtues are the right ones.

Science has been long engaged the quest for answers to these questions. Pieper in his book “The Four Cardinal Virtues” numbers out certain values that have been proven throughout history as the most widely accepted by political thought: Prudence – wisdom, sagacity, Justice – fairness, righteousness, Fortitude – endurance, patience, courage and Temperance – moderation, temperance, sobriety (Pieper 1965, 125). Some modes of thought have sought the foundation of these virtues in the secular sphere. Bentham contends that “Prudence and effective benevolence (...) being the only two intrinsically useful virtues. All other virtues must derive their value from them, and be subservient to them, and be subservient to them.” (Hazlitt 1994, 82). Justice, righteousness and fairness are the second set of divine attributes which directly determines the outcome of a person’s life. The quality of being just and fair, the principles of righteousness and fairness in man’s attitude and behavior, the strict application of moral obligations and the practical agreement with natural and divine law, the integrity in behavior among each other, as well as fairness, equality, honesty, and openness are as well all together values and virtues requested per Biblical instruction.

MORALITY AND ETHICS IN A SOCIETY

Morality: Notion and theoretical postulates

Christian political thought and philosophy in general have been continually trying to analyze the issues of morality and ethics. There are differences in approaches depending on the historical period. A brief overview of the theoretical views of some political thinkers throughout the centuries will bring us closer to the core of the issue.

Utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill, also known as “Highest possible happiness principle” is a category that should be applied in politics, and he believes that the happiness of the individuals in a community, their safety and their satisfaction is the ultimate goal of all possible goals, that legislators must take into consideration.

Descriptive generalizations are able to formulate normative principles. Accordingly, science in certain situations includes not only research of the facts, but also generalization of normative ethical principles. Often, moral principles are available for empirical testing and evaluation, as much as the law of physics or human behavior, thus ethics is a kind of science in the narrow sense of the word. “To found virtue in pleasure, also makes ethics an empirical science, since pleasure is immediately experienced, while virtue can only be defined. Thus the course for a moral philosophy would be consistent within the frame of reference of the new science.” (Von Eckardt 1959, 307).

For Plato, the source of all knowledge is intuition, including both, knowledge in a general sense of the word as well as knowledge about justice in a country. Ethics is the highest form of cognitive consciousness, and political ethics is its most important segment. Without knowledge for good, hardly anyone could act wisely and fairly. For Plato, the moral views of the participants in the political system discover and establish the justice system and strengthen the justice therein. Although based upon subjective elements, this assertion albeit has objective firmness that has been reflected in empirical practices throughout history.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his political writings - and especially in his work “Social Contract” (1762), based on the Plato’s assumptions that political justice can be known only through a morally upright view – is looking for the right principles for establishing a good society, and requires an introduction of moral legitimate constitutional principles.

Augustine sees the source of the fundamental moral principles as founded in the Bible, and as set straight from God. But as such they are not simply revealed to mankind. On the contrary, in order for someone to come to the correct knowledge of the actual moral principles, he must discern the true essence of faith, and reach for the right knowledge about God, i.e. to have faith that leads to the knowledge of God. Discovering God's truths we actually discover the moral truths, says Augustine.

Hence, the arguments for moral principles and truths spring from faith and the Bible, not from any human authority. Augustine further says that the understanding of the knowledge of God is a reward for faith, and that is why he emphasizes the need not to seek understanding in order to believe, but to believe in order to understand. Augustine in the Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 29, analyzing the Biblical quotes from John 7:14-18, concludes that the knowledge of the truth of God incorporates the knowledge and principles of morality.

Emil Brunner in his book “Justice and Social Order” analyzes the question for the valid criteria that determine which positive laws are fair and just. In search for answers, Brunner took the position of Augustine, according to which the idea of justice and the concept of divine law are the same work. Either the word justice refers to the primal ordinance of God, and has the ring of holiness and absolute validity, or it is as a tinkling cymbal and sounding brass.” (Brunner and Hottinger 1945, 46).

Thus he who does not believe in God, who has not have revealed the importance of the Word and the knowledge of it, including the knowledge of moral principles and of righteousness, and fairness, actually has no valid criteria to determine what is fair and just, and what is not; what springs from true moral premise, and what does not.

Every society needs working principles, criteria for its positive laws and a system of limitation of evil and injustice. The moral view, therefore, springs from religious ideas, or rather of the evangelical law on Christian faith. And therefore, the law of fairness and justice is actually a law of love, the original sacrificial Christian agape love (Niebuhr 1935, 105). Martin Luther King in his famous *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* wrote:

How can someone determine whether certain law is just or unjust? The righteous law is a norm, which although prepared by man, is in compliance and adjusted in accordance with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a norm also, but a norm which is not in a harmony with the moral law. (King 1963).

Morality is defined as a human behavior that is freely subordinate to the ideal of what is good and right, and appropriate. This is not about discovering new principles, but the better application of those that already exist and are accepted. Morality is often associated with ethics, but also with the church and religious belief in general. According to the Biblical view, morality derives directly from God's revelation to mankind, as it has been described in the Bible. The relationship between morality and religion is often discussed, and ethical philosophy believes correctly that moral action depends on religion. “Divine Command Theory includes the claim that morality is ultimately based on the commands or character of God, and that the morally right action is the one that God commands or requires. All versions of the theory hold in common the claim that morality and moral obligations ultimately depend on God.” (Austin 2005, 1).

Ethics: Notion and theoretical postulates

Ethics is study of the concept that refers to practical reasoning for good, proper, duties and obligations, values and virtues, freedom and liberties, rationality and free choice in life. Ethics is often equated with morality and the general perception is that both categories are the same. Ethics tries to discover the principles based on which humanity differentiates between good and evil, and on that basis tries to establish a set of knowledge and principles that will regulate human behavior under certain established standards. The source of such knowledge and principles is not an external one, i.e. does not come from some alienated center, but has been established over a certain period of time through the process of forming a perception of what is good and what is evil. “Hence, ethics may be defined as the science of the moral rectitude of human acts in accordance with the first principles of natural reason. Logic and ethics are normative and practical sciences.” (Cathrein 1909).

Thus, ethics has its background in man's own experience and partly in the principles and truths adopted by other scientific disciplines such as philosophy, logic and metaphysics. As a science, ethics has its own method, which is either speculative or empirical, or one that derives from metaphysics, as well as a fourth form of method which derives from experiences. Hence, it is seen that the supernatural Christian revelation is not an appropriate source for the definitions ethics uses, although some elements derived from it comprise the science of ethics.

Kant has revolutionized the view of ethics, transforming it from a purely theoretical field of knowledge to a field of practical application of knowledge. He finds ethics in the absolute, universal and categorical moral law. He says that the law should not be connected to an external authority, but should become a law of our own reasoning, which is an autonomous and subjective principle and a motive that will become an individual will. Thus, ethics has in itself a human judgment; it is a product of human sophistry and philosophy and is a result of human empirical experience. "First of all, the sublime beautiful on Kant's view is a uniquely human experience (...) and the human capacity for the experience of the sublime lies directly in our own predisposition for feeling moral ideas." (Louden 2000, 118).

It means that its principles and motives fall under a category which is subject to the ravages of time, although it does tend to be more extensive and of a better quality as time passes by. However it is influenced by the social environment where it has been continually profiled as the basis for human behavior in society. Accordingly, ethics is an entirely different concept of morals and morality because they originate from an external authority, which is God's law and the moral postulates in it, and these in turn are considered to be a dogma and are not subject to change, regardless of the impact of the social environment.

Differences between morality and ethics

There are differences in the understanding of ethics and morality. The difference basically comes from the foundations from which these two categories are claiming their essential meaning i.e. from an external source which is the Bible in the case of morality versus an empirical experience throughout the centuries in the case of ethics. "Ethics is the difference between morality and legality. Ethics is the difference between what I ought to do and what the law demands I must do." (Deffinbaugh 2004).

Another issue that is being contemplated by political thought, and is related to the differences between ethics and morality, is the connection between the moral sources of values in different cultures to the type of institutions that are optimal for providing a realistic platform for incarnating such moral impulses (Buijs 2002, 6). Western understanding of morality, developed in a religious context, comes from a "Jewish - Christian tradition". The practical sources of moral reasoning in this tradition are the key texts of the Jewish and Christian holy books, where moral obligation derives from God's commandments (Burns 2008, 7).

There are questions concerning the link between the golden rule of Christianity and the ways in which it can be applied in the modern world. There are as well questions pertaining to the relations between the moral rules and the current moral norms which are a fundament for making specific life decisions (Burns 2008, 16). Also, the central question is whether the moral norms operate in the field of law and jurisprudence?

Does morality determine legal rules and regulations? If so, then how? How should the legislation and practices take into account and treat the moral law?" (Burns 2008, 17-18). These are also challenging questions for science to address for it, should be examining the ways of accommodating the legal system into the traditional moral value system of the Bible.

The Christian idea of "*caritas*" and "love for all" through the grace of Christ became one of the fundamental ideas of modern living and a constitutive element of the western system of care, through homes for the poor, hospitals, orphanages and numerous other social institutions, institutions for children without parents, children and persons with disabilities or with special needs.

According to the French thinker Montesquieu, an indispensable feature of republican government is the value, virtue, or moral excellence, as some call it. When values are pulled out of the public scene and disappear, then ambition enters into people's hearts and lusts conquer the stage, love and the care for other humans disappears, and fear permeates everywhere (Bonta 2003, 10).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND INFLUENCE OVER SOCIETY

Morality is a teaching of the appropriate behavior of individuals, nations and society as a whole. The primary moral principles, prescribed as a recipe for the functioning of humanity, were given in God's word, in the Old Testament of the Bible. There within mankind was given a set of moral rules in the form of commandments on how to regulate relations between family members, between old and young, between employers and workers, rich and poor, men and women, rulers and subjects to rule.

Through many commandments in the form of moral principles, the character of God has been replicated, as is the example of Genesis 18:25. According to this view, God revealed Himself to men as just and fair, and people are His image on the earth, so they need to be fair and equitable as well, so as not to undermine that image of God in themselves. The prime objective of declaring to mankind that people are created in the image of God on earth, is to understand that if we exist in the image of God and are created by Him, then we are capable to be like God, thus we have sufficient potential for performing justice and for exercising an equitable and fair behavior toward others.

Morality in Judaism is linked to special moral types as justice, wisdom and honesty, as opposed to the negative perceptions of evil, stupidity and blasphemy. Teachers of Judaism encapsulate the definition of morality in the phrase "between a man and his friend", a phrase which has grown in the so-called "The Way of the World" or "proper behavior" ("*Derekh Eretz*") applied philosophy. "The challenge to legal positivism must come from morality, and the type of morality that coherently transcends merely procedural questions." (Walzer 2006, 139). Hence morality was raised into becoming one of the central components of Judaism.

MORAL POLITICS: THE ASPECTS OF RULING SOCIETIES

Political sciences in general aim to discern and resolve many ideological conflicts. One of the issues that is constantly at the top of political discourse is whether the morality and ethics should be pivotal factors for the political decision making process in contemporary societies.

The core values that stimulate moral political debate are deeply rooted in the personal belief system of the individual, determining how he or she defines his or her own place in society. Those values of primary identity are race, gender, sexual orientation, and especially religion, which is the basis of many of individual's most fundamental values (Button, Rienzo and Wald 1997, 5-6).

Moral politics pulls us out of the area where facts and reasoning dominate, and social scientists - especially those specializing in political science - feel more comfortable in the realm of the value system. Moral policies are for the most part dealing with values, especially those values that are accepted by society or the state, and those values that are defined by the society or the state as perverted. "As we have changed from a commercial society to an industrial one, we have developed a new set of values in which self-control, impulse renunciation, discipline, and sobriety are no longer such hallowed virtues." (Gusfield 1963, 6). The state acceptance of values reinforces the social status of certain groups, and reduces the status of others (Mooney 2001, 37).

The subject of political analysis in contemporary life today is a special matter of consistency of personal values and attitudes, and political practices, when the faithful is in a position to exercise power. The basic principle is that the faithful must practice leadership with integrity, and his personal values and attitudes must correspond and be consistent with his political views and decisions, even at the cost of losing the support of the electorate. The contemporary political practice shows that there are a large number of active politicians who do not understand and do not accept the significance of the moral aspects of political issues as a foundation for right and proper conducting of state politics. This field is subject to pressure of the type leading to serious compromises with that which is worldly and carnal, thus compromising with God and His instructions.

The possibility of re-moralization poses some significant questions: Where do moral values come from, and what, in particular, are the sources of moral values in a postindustrial society? This is a subject that, strangely enough, has not received much attention (...) Most people would say that values are either passed along from previous generations through socialization, or are imposed by a church or other hierarchical authority. (Fukuyama 1999, 32).

The answers to these questions will still have to be sought after deep in the sphere of spirituality and God. The assessment is that religious institutions might play a crucial role in the actual imposition of views to the public in order to influence the political establishment when making policy decisions.

According to the morality point of view, there is a need for stressing the principle of not making or carrying out any political decisions, pertaining issues deeply tied in with morality and laden with moral scruples, in an exclusively secular sphere, and without any participation of the spiritually-oriented segment of society and without taking into account the opinion of the religious faith sector. Any issue that contends ethical or moral elements

is an issue that should be delegated to the spiritual and religious camp, in order to try to offer more adequate solutions in a given historical context. My understanding is that answers to moral questions or issues with moral character in it must have a moral source, and accordingly for this point of view that is the Bible. Fukuyama concludes that:

The virtues of honesty and reliability, which are key to social cooperation and are intangible compound of mutual trust and engagement, are called 'social capital'. Many people have argued that such virtues have religious sources, and that contemporary capitalist societies are living off the cultural capital of previous ages - in America, chiefly its Puritan traditions. Modern capitalism, in this view, with its amoral emphasis on profits and efficiency, is steadily undermining its own moral basis. (Fukuyama 1999, 32).

The questions related to the segment of an applied ethics, which have an ethical sub context, appear to be more natural in essence. The Medical ethics and Bioethics focuses on issues of health care and clinical practices, dealing with situations of life or death, and also some extreme situations such as surrogate motherhood, genetic manipulation of fetal status, unused frozen embryos, abortion, medical experimentation, the rights of persons with mental disability, medical justification for suicide intervention or physician-assisted euthanasia and many other situations that contemporary medical and clinical practice have consistently met (New World Encyclopedia 2016).

The second area is called business ethics, and it examines the moral controversies relating to social responsibility and other capitalist business practices, the moral status of corporate groups, misleading advertising, insider trading, fundamental rights of employees, discrimination at work place, mobbing, affirmative action, testing for the presence of drugs, disclosure of fraud and mishandling of a company, and the like.

Today, an increasing interest by the public and society in general is directed towards the set of environmental ethical issues and protection of the environment. These issues are not of any less importance for the contemporary world than the aforementioned ones. Sexual morality, monogamy versus polygamy, sexual relations without love, homosexual relationships and marital affairs belong to the set of issues with moral controversy, as well.

Social ethics and morality deal with issues such as death penalty or capital punishment, the use of nuclear weapons, arms control, and recreational use of soft drugs, welfare rights, racism and other. All the above mentioned matters of question are subject to a public and academic debate and serious analysis. Humanity and science have not yet given satisfactory answers to many of these bones of contention. That which is considered moral by some, is condemned by others. All these dilemmas are challenging for today's scientific and political thought. In order to respond appropriately, fairly and equitably to all of them, and to offer proper and adequate solutions, there is a need of an open academic mind and the acceptance of additional sources of knowledge.

Christian ethics is defined as the search for good in people. It is not a precise science, but it rather represents a growing practical wisdom which springs from different sources. It relies on that which is good in God's creation and among peoples and nations. But it also divulges that creatures cannot reach the ultimate goal of their existence without this gift of divine goodness in them. "Belief in God, properly understood, is seen as the most fitting response to a world which already shows evidence of moral and physical order and love." (Gill 1999, 232).

CONCLUSION


Morality and ethics as social categories are crucial for generating a sound political culture in any society. Through the process of political socialization these categories influence not only the culture in a nation but its political ideologies as well.

Even though there are differing views in regards to the source of moral foundation which concern the societal realm outside of the religious or theological environment, it is this religious i.e. theological environment that is the only viable sustainable milieu for moral existence. The principles of morality and ethics established as societal standards are the bases of individual and societal development.

The outstanding illustration of the fusing and separation of the provinces of ethics, law, and theology is the growths of the doctrine of Natural Law...Rules based on reason were law by nature. The right or the just by nature became law by nature or natural law. In this way began the identification of the legal with the moral. (Hazlitt 1994, 62).

Their impact upon society is sizable, and if we look at the jurisprudence segment of society, that which is apparent is the existence of an eminent moral and ethical human characteristic responsible for the appropriate preparation of a legislation founded in ethics and morality. This is not always the case, due to the secular public overtones and the predominantly secular political sphere. Notwithstanding, repeatedly throughout history, these two categories of ethics and morality have made a huge beneficial impact driving forward the positive societal development in many segments of society.

Even if religion cannot tell us anything about what the specific moral rules ought to be, is it necessary in order to secure observance of the moral code?...Still, the belief in an all-knowing and all-judging God remains a tremendous force in ethical conduct today. (Hazlitt 1994, 352-353).

We may underscore the substantial impact that these two categories - morality and ethics - have played in shaping societies in general and political relations in particular. It is morality that digs deep inside a man's personality or inside a person's heart, for his or her benefit in general. The morality in politics or the concept of moral politics has the potential to pervade the political scene and to become an indispensable factor in profiling the political life in contemporary societies. 

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